



## **Mission Possible: A Comprehensive Teacher Incentive Program in Guilford County, North Carolina**

**April 2008**

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### **Introduction**

The Guilford County Schools, in North Carolina, face the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools that span both urban and rural settings. The district, located in the north-central part of North Carolina, is the third largest in the state with more than 71,000 students. The district includes both urban and rural schools, many of which are considered hard-to-staff and serve at-risk students. For instance, it includes schools in the cities of Greensboro and High Point as well as the remote rural areas of Gibsonville and Whitsett on the eastern side of the county.

In addition to recruiting high-quality teachers and principals for at-risk and hard-to-staff schools, the district has had challenges in recruiting high-quality teachers for certain subjects. During the 2005–06 school year, for example, one of Guilford County’s middle schools had no certified mathematics teachers on staff (Abramson, 2006). In response to these challenges, the district designed *Mission Possible*, an alternative compensation program intended to address teacher shortages and turnover in many of its at-risk and hard-to-staff schools and subject areas. The district launched *Mission Possible* in the fall of 2006 as a three-year pilot program (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008; M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). The design and initiation of *Mission Possible* was largely spearheaded through the leadership of the district superintendent, Dr. Terry Grier. The program was designed to meet the following objectives (Guilford County Schools, 2008a):

- **Improve school performance**, increasing the number of high-need schools that meet adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- **Raise student achievement**, increasing the number of students from high-need schools who pass the end-of-course state standardized test(s).
- **Decrease teacher turnover**, reducing the teacher turnover rate for high-need schools.

When *Mission Possible* was created, the district had several teacher-pay incentive options available through state-funded efforts but none were specifically targeted to address the district’s considerable challenges with teacher recruitment and retention in high-need schools and subject areas. For example, Guilford County Schools receives a local salary supplement from the state that is equal to about 10.6 percent of the state base salary for teachers; this amount is added to

base pay for *all* teachers so the supplement does not serve as differentiated pay to recruit and/or retain teachers for specific schools (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). Also, the state provides a 12 percent salary increase for teachers who earn National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification with no requirements that these teachers teach in hard-to-staff schools or subjects. Despite these efforts, Guilford County perpetually suffers from teacher shortages, teacher turnover, and overall poor teacher quality in certain schools and subject areas (Grier & Holcombe, in press).

This case summary examines five aspects of the *Mission Possible* program: (1) creation and approval of the program, (2) program management and school selection, (3) program components, (4) factors contributing to the successful implementation of the program, and (5) lessons learned. The information detailed in this case summary is based on background conversations with a district administrator and a representative from the local education association as well as written publications such as news articles. A structured protocol was used during background conversations in order to acquire consistent information about the program.

## **The Path to *Mission Possible* Program Approval**

In 2005, the Guilford County Schools hosted teacher focus groups to determine what would attract teachers to its high-need schools and subject areas as well as encourage them to stay. Teachers indicated they wanted quality leaders, higher pay, more and better professional development, coaching, and smaller class sizes. Armed with this feedback, the district sought a solution. Through a relatively swift process, the district and the Guilford County Board of Education developed and approved the *Mission Possible* program in less than one year.

District officials internally designed a preliminary proposal for the program and they did so with consultation from some teachers through some stakeholder meetings. However, the district did not engage in a large-scale communication process, such as collecting input through stakeholder (e.g., teacher) surveys or interviews, for the development of the initial proposal (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008). Then, in fall 2005, Dr. Grier approached the Guilford County Association of Educators (GCAE) to garner feedback on a draft of the program proposal. Although North Carolina is a right-to-work state and does not have labor unions, GCAE is quite influential and the success of *Mission Possible* would be unlikely without GCAE buy-in (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008). The draft proposal contained components related to pay incentives, performance accountability, professional development, and structural support (i.e., school working conditions). Although GCAE officials understood the need to recruit high-quality teachers for high-needs schools and subject areas, they also expressed concern about the potential of *Mission Possible* to adversely impact teacher morale (Grier & Holcombe, in press; M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

To obtain feedback on the program from teachers, GCAE hosted a community forum in which the superintendent presented the preliminary *Mission Possible* program. Many teachers who attended the forum opposed the program, indicating it might foster unnecessary competition among teachers. They further expressed concern that the district had not engaged teachers in the program's design and that the district planned to use the state-provided district salary supplement to fund the program (Fernandez, 2006; M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

Further, GCAE officials expressed concern about the proposed program's link between bonus pay and student academic achievement (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

On April 3, 2006, shortly after the community forum, Dr. Grier presented the draft program proposal to the Board of Education. He returned to the next Board of Education meeting, on April 17, 2006, to respond to questions about the potential program and its budget implications (Guilford County Board of Education, 2006a, 2006b). The originally proposed funding stream for the *Mission Possible* program would have reduced teachers' local salary supplement so that each teacher would receive about \$19 less pay per year than usual; this money, to be deducted annually, would then be redirected to the *Mission Possible* program.

GCAE officials, however, continued to share with the superintendent that many teachers thought their guaranteed salary supplement should not fund a program they did not help design or support (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). In reaction to this, Dr. Grier presented a revised *Mission Possible* proposal to the Board of Education on April 24, 2006 that projected a new funding mechanism different from what was proposed in the first draft of the proposal. This revised proposal essentially increased the *overall* local salary supplement to minimize the amount that *each* teacher would have to forego—\$5 annually (Guilford County Board of Education, 2006c). However, the district still had not completely responded to the *principle* behind teachers' not wanting their salary supplement to fund the program. Therefore, pressure from many teachers and from the GCAE to find a way to fund the program without tapping teachers' salaries persisted.

Dr. Grier and district staff revised the funding plan for *Mission Possible* once more so that it did not utilize funds from the teacher salary supplement (Guilford County Board of Education, 2006d). In the end, the superintendent and the district found a way to finance the program by (1) increasing average fifth-grade class sizes by 0.5 students, thus reducing the total number of fifth-grade teachers across the district; and (2) leaving 30 teaching assistant positions vacant. The district ended up allocating \$2,073,624 in local funding for the *Mission Possible* program for the 2006–07 school year (Grier & Holcombe, in press) to do away with the effect of the supplemental salary reduction, which helped gain teacher buy-in.

## **Program Management and School Selection**

A full-time senior director and data manager manage the *Mission Possible* program with guidance from an executive advisory team and a teacher advisory team. School principals and district administrators comprise the executive advisory team; mathematics, science, and language arts teachers from across the district comprise the teacher advisory team.

The district initially selected 20 *Mission Possible* schools for the three-year pilot program—nine elementary schools; four middle school; four high schools, and two middle-college high schools<sup>1</sup>. When selecting these schools, the district relied on the following three criteria:

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<sup>1</sup> Middle-college high schools are alternative high schools located on college and university campuses that focus on students who are “disengaged or disconnected” from traditional high schools (The Center for Public Education, 2008).

- **Student poverty.** The selected schools exceeded the district average of approximately 50 percent of students receiving free or reduced-price meals.
- **Teacher turnover.** The selected schools had high teacher turnover rates relative to other schools in the district.
- **School performance.** The selected schools did not AYP or were not meeting the expected growth in student performance measures according to the state's ABCs system. The ABCs system is a state-level school improvement and accountability system that measures student achievement in three ways: (1) percentage of student test scores at or above the proficient level, (2) academic growth, and (3) AYP status (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007).

After the district chose the 20 schools for the *Mission Possible* program based on the above criteria, district leaders had to decide whether to keep the current building principals or select new principals to lead those schools. To make these decisions, the district employed the Star Principal Selection program (Haberman, 2005) to identify principals who demonstrate effective leadership behaviors. After a group of potentially new principals for *Mission Possible* schools participated in the selection program, four principals replaced “young and inexperienced” principals at the *Mission Possible* schools (Grier & Holcombe, in press, p. 8).

By fall 2006, the district had secured two additional sources of program funding. First, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the district a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, allowing the district to expand the program to eight additional schools. These eight schools will participate in *Mission Possible* for two extra years beyond the three-year, locally funded pilot. Second, funding from a community business group called Action Greensboro, in partnership with the University of North Carolina (UNC) System, provided additional support for the district. This additional support funded a program called Cumulative Effect that exists in all *Mission Possible* schools. Cumulative Effect provides the mathematics teachers at these schools with a laptop, employs five additional mathematics coaches, and pays teachers an additional \$4,000 stipend for attending a proficiency- based 40-hour content mathematics training program. (This case summary focuses exclusively on the *Mission Possible* program and does not discuss the Cumulative Effect program.)

## ***Mission Possible* Program Components**

As a comprehensive recruitment and retention program, *Mission Possible* provides the following four components: recruitment and performance bonuses at varied levels for teachers and principals, staff development, performance accountability, and structural support.

### **Bonuses**

*Mission Possible* can provide teachers and principals both recruitment and retention bonuses as well as performance incentives. Recruitment and retention bonuses are offered each year to every teacher in a qualifying position (see Table 1) and to principals who work in *Mission Possible* schools. To teach in a *Mission Possible* school, teachers must be highly qualified; they also must be screened and interviewed through a process modeled after the Haberman Star Teacher

Interview (The Haberman Educational Foundation, 2008). This interview process focuses on how teachers will work with at-risk youth.

Recruitment bonuses range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 and are spread out across 10 paychecks throughout the year. Mathematics teachers with a mathematics degree and 24 hours of training in the content area as well as all Algebra I teachers receive higher bonuses due to the high demand for teachers in these subject areas. Principals' bonuses are based on the grade level of their schools: The higher the grade levels of students in their schools, the higher the bonuses that principals receive. Larger bonuses consider the hard-to-staff nature of these positions as well as the relative difficulty of the principalship in high schools and middle schools as opposed to elementary schools. Table 1 shows the *Mission Possible* school positions that qualify for recruitment and retention bonuses as well as the amount of each bonus.

**Table 1. *Mission Possible* Recruitment/Retention Bonuses**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Recruitment/ Retention Bonus</b>
Grades K–5 regular classroom teacher	\$2,500
Grades 6–8 language arts or reading teacher	\$2,500
Grades 6–12 mathematics teacher (without a mathematics degree or 24 content hours)	\$2,500
Grades 6–12 mathematics teacher (with a mathematics degree or 24 content hours)	\$9,000
Algebra I teacher	\$10,000
English I teacher	\$2,500
Elementary Principal	\$5,000
Middle School Principal	\$7,500
High School Principal	\$10,000

*Source:* Adapted from the Guilford County Schools website (see Guilford County Schools references “a” and “b”)

In addition to the recruitment/retention bonus, teachers whose students demonstrate learning gains greater than the expected amount also can earn a performance bonus. To qualify for a performance bonus, a teacher must teach an eligible, tested subject (language arts or reading, English, and mathematics) and have enough qualifying students to be able to analyze student learning gains, i.e., 10 or more students who have at least three data points. For all grades—except for Grade 3—the program utilizes William Sanders’ value-added formula and contracts out with the SAS Institute to analyze data and produce value-added reports indicating which *Mission Possible* teachers should receive performance incentives. For Grade 3 teachers, the district uses the academic growth component of the state’s ABCs school improvement and accountability system rather than value-added data to make the performance incentive decision because no value-added data is available for third graders. Although value-added data are used to make the performance incentive decision for teachers in Grades 4–12, the data points vary. Frequently, more than three data points are available; the formula for determining if a *Mission Possible* teacher should receive a performance bonus utilizes any and all of these available data points. For example, the data points that determine whether a Grade 4 *Mission Possible* teacher



receives a performance incentive include the Grade 3 reading and math pretests and the Grade 3 reading and math end-of-year tests.

The value-added data are used to determine a teacher's "effect." A teacher's "effect" is compared to that of all other Guilford County Schools teachers who have taught the same course in the same school year. If a teacher teaches in more than one eligible subject area, a composite score determines the teacher's overall effect level (Guilford County Schools, 2008a). Teachers' effect scores are either "below" the mean, have no detectable difference from the mean, or are "above" the mean rating. Teachers may receive either a Level I or Level II performance incentive based on whether student learning gains are at or above the district mean. (See the Appendix for further details about the process for determining performance pay for the first year of implementation.)

Performance incentives for teachers are paid out in late November of the following school year (Guilford County Schools, 2008a), and teachers who are eligible to receive a performance incentive and no longer work at a *Mission Possible* school still receive their incentive. Performance incentives for principals and curriculum facilitators, on the other hand, are based on whether or not the school makes AYP. Table 2 below shows the *Mission Possible* school positions that qualify for performance incentives, as well as the amount of each incentive.

**Table 2. *Mission Possible* Performance Incentives**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Level I Performance Incentive Based on Value-Added Data</b>	<b>Level II Performance Incentive Based on Value-Added Data</b>	<b>Performance Incentive if School Makes AYP</b>
Grades 3–5 teacher	\$2,500	\$4,000	N/A
Grades 6–8 language arts/reading teacher	\$2,500	\$4,000	N/A
Grades 6–12 mathematics teacher	\$2,500	\$4,000	N/A
Algebra I teacher	\$2,500	\$4,000	N/A
English I teacher	\$2,500	\$4,000	N/A
Principal	N/A	N/A	\$5,000
Curriculum Facilitator	N/A	N/A	\$2,500

*Source:* Adapted from the Guilford County Schools website (see Guilford County Schools references "a" and "b")

Both the recruitment/retention bonuses and the performance incentives are somewhat controversial in the district (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008; M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). Although *Mission Possible* awards a bonus to all eligible teachers in participating schools, many teachers disagree with offering different award amounts for different subject areas. A GCAE official suggested that the different bonus amounts might negatively affect morale in the schools (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). *Mission Possible* is also controversial because many teachers are ineligible for a performance incentive because they do not teach in a tested subject area or grade. For example, special education teachers are not eligible for the performance incentive. A GCAE official said that all

teachers in *Mission Possible* schools who work with a student should be eligible to receive the performance incentive; furthermore, he mentioned that the performance incentive component does not recognize the Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 teachers who “build that foundation” (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). In response to these concerns, the district reminds stakeholders that it will reassess the program and obtain additional input at the end of the pilot (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

After the first year of implementation, nearly a fourth (24 percent) of *Mission Possible* faculty earned a performance incentive, for a total payout of \$268,250 (Guilford County Schools, 2007). The district allocated \$1.2 million for the performance incentives, leaving a significant fund balance that the superintendent proposed to be reallocated to another program in the district (Benscoter, 2007a). The *Mission Possible* project director confirmed that excess *Mission Possible* local funds were redirected to open a credit-recovery school for students to attend in the evenings (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

### **Staff Development**

Staff members who work in *Mission Possible* schools and receive bonuses must participate in the staff development component of the program. The program assigns teachers to professional development courses based on the number of years the teacher has taught in a *Mission Possible* school. The first two years of staff development include foundation courses and core training, such as cooperative learning and differentiated instruction. The third year of staff development is customized to meet the needs of the school and individual teachers (Guilford County Schools, 2008b). Teachers must complete the professional development within a 13-month window. Bonus-eligible *Mission Possible* staff members who do not attend all of the required professional development trainings do not receive their award.

### **Performance Accountability**

The district uses student-learning gains not only to calculate whether an eligible *Mission Possible* teacher may receive a performance bonus but also to hold *Mission Possible* teachers and principals accountable for their students’ performance. For example, tenured teachers who have negative value-added data for two years in a row are moved out of a *Mission Possible* school. The district’s Human Resources staff manages this teacher reassignment, and principals are not included in the decision-making process. At this point in the program, the district has not terminated any teachers or principals but instead has simply reassigned them to a non-*Mission Possible* school.

After the first year of implementation (2006–07), the district moved 12 people out of *Mission Possible* schools, including some veteran teachers (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008). One interviewee commented that if Guilford County had a teachers union, the district would not be in a position to administratively reassign teachers and principals based on program criteria that were not jointly designed with the teachers (M. Jewell, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

The performance accountability provision for principals states that if a principal’s *Mission Possible* school does not make AYP for three years in a row, the principal is administratively

placed in a non-*Mission Possible* school (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

## **Structural Support**

The district uses a portion of the *Mission Possible* funding to improve teacher working conditions in these schools. The program provides funds to reduce class sizes in Kindergarten through Grade 3 and Algebra I classes in *Mission Possible* schools. Some research shows that class-size reduction may be most effective if implemented in the early grades of Kindergarten through Grade 3 in reading and mathematics (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1999; Molnar, Smith, & Zahorik, 1999). The district also provides *Mission Possible* schools with additional resources, such as \$20,000 for additional technologies in high school mathematics classrooms (e.g., laptop, LCD projector, graphing calculators).

## **Factors Contributing to the Successful Implementation of *Mission Possible***

The Guilford County Schools completed the first full year of *Mission Possible* implementation in 2006–07. Two implementation factors emerged as critical for the continued success of the program: the district’s communication processes with stakeholders and the outcomes indicating program effectiveness.

### **Communication With Stakeholders**

Koppich and Prince (2007) cite quality communication as one of the most important aspects of implementing an alternative compensation program. In an effort to share information about program components and processes (e.g. when payouts occur) with teachers and other stakeholders, the *Mission Possible* program staff focus a great deal of attention on communication. The program website ([http://www.gcsnc.com/depts/mission\\_possible/index.htm](http://www.gcsnc.com/depts/mission_possible/index.htm)) serves as the hub for all communication. The site includes links to the *Mission Possible* communications plan, lists of *Mission Possible* schools by level, program criteria, frequently asked questions, monthly newsletters, and a glossary of terms.

The *Mission Possible* communications plan details four goals (see Guilford County Schools website reference “c”):

1. Communicating about goals, policies, and procedures.
2. Raising awareness about goals, activities, and achievements.
3. Using program success as a marketing strategy.
4. Using media outlets to garner awareness and support for the program.

The district also relies on face-to-face communication with staff at *Mission Possible* schools to share program information as well as to acquire first-hand knowledge about the implementation of the program at each school. Two opportunities for face-to-face communication include site-based orientations and “walk-throughs” at the *Mission Possible* schools. Every year, the project director and other program staff conduct site-based orientations at each *Mission Possible* school



to review the program with school staff. The program director and staff also conduct periodic “walk-throughs” of the schools to identify school climate or instructional quality issues. Walk-throughs take place on an as-needed basis to carry out status-checks or to follow-up on a specific issue of concern. One interviewee said that *Mission Possible* staff sometimes perform targeted walk-throughs during the school year at schools in which teachers are at risk of nonrenewal (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

Despite a comprehensive communications plan, when it came to talking about results of the program with the general public, communication and outreach efforts were not entirely transparent. After learning about another district that had a negative experience communicating about its pay-reform initiative with the public, the Guilford County Schools district decided to correspond with the media in preparation for news about the first performance bonus payout. Before the first round of bonus payouts in November 2007, the district told media outlets that the district would not make *individual* information about recruitment and performance incentives publicly available (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008). This decision appears to have been somewhat controversial as it was in contrast to the district’s history of scrutinizing data and frequently making data available to the public (Benscoter, 2007b). The district’s school board attorney publicly supported the district’s decision by saying that the public is not allowed to know data pertaining to *individual* performance bonuses because it is confidential personnel information (Benscoter, 2007b). Therefore, in a memo to the Board of Education on April 25, 2007, Dr. Grier presented a *cumulative* account of the number of *Mission Possible* staff who received performance incentives. The district was thus able to circumvent potential criticism that other districts have encountered after communicating individual teachers’ and principals’ performance bonuses to the general public.

## **Program Effectiveness**

Outcomes indicating effectiveness are another important factor critical for the continued success of the program. As the district begins the second year of implementing *Mission Possible*, district officials are considering whether or not the program is meeting its goals. Because the program is considered a pilot, the district is also considering possible program adjustments for the future. With respect to recruitment, the superintendent stated that the extra money is making a difference; at the outset of the program, all of the positions eligible for extra pay were filled with teachers who were fully qualified (Silberman, 2006). In fact, one month after the *Mission Possible* program was approved, the district had 174 applicants to teach mathematics, compared to just seven the year before (Klein, 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, the program has retained its *Mission Possible* teachers; 87 percent of the teachers from the 2006–07 school year returned for the 2007–08 school year (Guilford County Schools, 2008d). District officials attribute this retention to the extra pay and the training that teachers receive through the *Mission Possible* program (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

The only way to definitively determine if the program is working, however, is to examine evaluation results related to the program objectives. To that end, Guilford County secured the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina–Greensboro (UNCG) as an external evaluator. SERVE evaluates the extent to which the program is recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators as proposed, the extent to which teachers and administrators are trained as

proposed, and the extent to which the program impacts teacher and student outcomes (SERVE Center, 2007). SERVE released its Year 1 External Evaluation Report on April 2, 2008 (SERVE Center at UNCG, 2008). Comparing data from 2005-06 (the year before the launch of the *Mission Possible* program) to 2006-07 data (the first year of implementation of the *Mission Possible* program), the evaluators report improvement in several areas as a reflection of increasing program success. For example, the evaluators report a decrease in both principal and teacher turnover in the *Mission Possible* schools between the two years. In addition, the percentage of students passing the ABCs increased and the number of schools meeting AYP increased between the two years. However, SERVE will not be able to do a comparison of how program incentives impact turnover, training, and student outcomes until next year's final report, when there are two full years of *Mission Possible* program data.

## Conclusion and Lessons Learned

Much of the *Mission Possible* success up to this point can be attributed to the district leadership of Superintendent Terry Grier, Ed.D. However, Dr. Grier will leave in June 2008 to take a new position with the San Diego Unified School District (Gao, 2008). One interviewee noted that the district hopes to get a new superintendent who agrees with and will continue the vision of *Mission Possible* (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

The *Mission Possible* program is currently completing its second year of implementation. A few lessons learned have emerged as important for the continued success of the *Mission Possible* program, and are worth sharing with other states and districts implementing targeted pay-reform initiatives aimed at improving teacher quality in high-needs schools.

- ***Mission Possible* appears to be a promising reform effort because it focuses on the district's areas of highest need.** *Mission Possible* focuses on the hardest-to-staff schools and subject areas in the district. The chosen schools have high numbers of low-performing students in poverty, and the chosen subject areas are the hardest-to-staff for the district. The district made data-driven decisions to focus on these schools and subject areas. The *Mission Possible* project manager mentioned that if more funds were available, the program might consider adding more schools to the pool (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).
- **The district may have experienced a smoother process for acquiring approval and initial teacher buy-in had it fully engaged teachers and the local teachers' association in the development of the *Mission Possible* program from the beginning.** Koppich and Prince (2007) caution against district officials working alone on the details of a program and then announcing it to those who will be affected by it. Although the Guilford County Schools consulted with some stakeholders during program design and requested feedback from GCAE before *Mission Possible* was finalized, the district developed the program proposal largely internally. Because Guilford County Schools does not have a teachers union with collective bargaining abilities, the district may not have had a specific incentive to design the initial program proposal with a representative teachers union group "at the table." As a result, many teachers opposed its first introduction. For example, the superintendent had to find district funding mechanisms other than the teachers' local salary supplement because of the significant amount of

resistance from teachers and the GCAE. District officials may have been able to circumvent this issue had they developed the initial program proposal in collaboration with teachers and the teachers' association. One interviewee noted that in April 2008, the district will host four focus groups to collect data that will be used to shape future program activities (A. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2008).

- **The district must secure reliable and sustainable funding.** Funding has been an important part of the *Mission Possible* story. The program's original proposal for funding was not used. Instead, the superintendent, GCAE, and Board of Education had to be flexible and responsive to the district's and the teachers' needs during the approval process and change the proposed funding mechanisms accordingly. In addition, the district collaborated with UNCG and Action Greensboro to secure further assistance. They also reached out to the U.S. Department of Education to obtain TIF grant funding that supports the goals of *Mission Possible*. Last, the superintendent's 2007–08 budget proposed \$1.2 million “growth dollars” (i.e., money coming from the projected 1,833 additional students for next school year) to pay for the *Mission Possible* incentives in 2007–08 (Benscoter, 2007b).
- **Communication is key.** The fact that the district developed and implemented a communications plan is critical. The communications plan states that not only are district staff committed to keeping *Mission Possible* stakeholders abreast of program logistics, but that they also intend to highlight areas of success to serve as a model for other schools, districts, and states. The program's comprehensive website also contributes to effective communication.

The *Mission Possible* program has garnered a great deal of national attention. For example, one news article states the need to “follow the lead of Guilford County, North Carolina, where top-notch instructors are paid top dollar to teach at the toughest schools” (Martinez, 2006). Many stakeholders, researchers, and policymakers look forward to more specific evaluation results. Until then, the *Mission Possible* program serves as a model to many of how to effectively conceptualize, fund, and implement a comprehensive teacher incentive pay system.

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## Appendix

### Process for Determining Performance Pay at Guilford County Schools: 2006–07 School Year

The following table provides details about the process for determining performance pay for the first year of *Mission Possible* program implementation in Guilford County.

Date	Event
9/6/07	Student-Teacher Linkage spreadsheets were sent to each <i>Mission Possible</i> school for verification.
9/6/07–9/14/07	Principals reviewed Student-Teacher Linkages with individual teachers. Both the teacher and the principal signed off on these verifications and returned them to the <i>Mission Possible</i> Office.
9/10/07	<i>Mission Possible</i> positions were verified by staffing and payroll specialists.
9/11/07	Principals verified staff who were assigned to <i>Mission Possible</i> positions.
9/17/07–9/28/07	Human Resources staff conducted on-site Teacher Orientation Sessions at each <i>Mission Possible</i> school.
9/21/07	Student-Teacher Linkage corrections were sent to the SAS Institute.
10/18/07	SAS generated value-added data reports for each teacher who taught an end-of-grade or end-of-course tested course.
10/24/07	Using value-added data, the <i>Mission Possible</i> Office determined performance incentive levels. Level I, \$2,500, was assigned to those scoring >1 standard error above the mean. Level II, \$4,000, was assigned to those scoring >1.5 standard errors above the mean.
10/31/07	Performance incentives were sent to payroll, to be included in the next month's paychecks.

Source: Adapted from Guilford County Schools (2007)

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The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) was awarded to Westat—in partnership with Learning Point Associates, Synergy Enterprises Inc., Vanderbilt University, and the University of Wisconsin—by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006.

The primary purpose of CECR is to support the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through a newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities. We look forward to an exciting partnership with the TIF grantees as we embark together on blazing a new path for education reform.

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